

A SHORT STORY FOR ALL SAINTS' DAY 2021

'⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.'⁶ Then he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.' (Rev. 21:5)

At St Mary's church Kempleford, the Sunday morning mass had just ended. The bespectacled priest Fr Brown was talking to a visiting couple. The redoubtable secretary Mrs McCarthy was giving directions to anyone or anything that moved.

'That's right, Father, we're just having a short break without our twins who are visiting my mother', explained Mum, 'I enjoyed the service, and your sermon.' 'Oh, thank you'. Actually, 'Father, that gives me an opening to ask you a question, if I may', said Dad. 'By all means, go ahead.' 'Well, in your sermon you talked about some famous saints but their lives don't really seem to be of much relevance to us ordinary people. Nearly all of them were unmarried men. They didn't have the family obligations we have.'

'If I may say so, this is a familiar but entirely reasonable comment! Without wanting to inflict another sermon on you, perhaps I could suggest one answer?' 'Please do', nodded Mum and Dad together.

Taking a deep breath, Father Brown continued, 'This is one occasion at least, where English usage is a hindrance to christian understanding. When the Church refers to 'saints', it nearly always means the sort of people you mentioned whose lives seem so far away from ours as to be totally irrelevant. But by 'saints' the early christians meant all believers. 'Yes, Father,' responded Mum, 'I've heard a similar comment before but surely the problem is this: how do we bridge the gap, as it were, between what the Church talks about and what the bible means.'

‘Well theories are no good; we need need an example of a real person such as St Therèse of Lisieux. Yes, I know she sounds all happy smiles but in fact she suffered considerable spiritual darkness.’ ‘I don’t quite see how that helps us, Father.’ ‘Perhaps not at first glance but if we remember that what was distinctive about her christian life wasn’t great visions and complicated thoughts. Not at all, she merely sought to serve God in her own particular situation, much of which was humdrum daily labour. She called this her ‘Little Way’. And in all of this she didn’t expect any sort of praise - no positive annual appraisals for her!’

Mrs McCarthy came bustling up, ‘Father, I’m afraid you’re wanted’, and left as quickly as she had arrived. Father Brown looked slightly embarrassed at this interruption but Mum spoke up at once, ‘We really must be going, long drive ahead. I must say Father, you’ve been very kind, spending so much time with us’. ‘Oh don’t mention it, we’re always glad to welcome visitors’. ‘Yes but after all we are *Anglican* visitors. ‘Well now’, beamed the good priest, ‘Isn’t that one of the good and lovely things All Saints’ is all about?’

Psalm 24

¹ The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it;

² for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.

³ Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?

⁴ Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully.

⁵ They will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of their salvation.

⁶ Such is the company of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

Michael Brown